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ABSTRACT

In response to the national impetus for improvement in education, New Jersey officials have proposed the creation of the Academy for the Advancement of Teaching and Management, an organization designed to raise the standards of professional skills for teachers and principals. The organization will train teachers and administrators for 2 years in specific structured teaching and instructional management practices. Participation will be voluntary, with elected schools sending a team of three to five teachers and the building principal. Various training programs, based upon different instructional strategies and approaches, will be offered. Trained teams will subsequently demonstrate and train others. This program, planned for joint funding, will be staffed by a director/trainer, several permanent staff trainers, a 1-year resident visiting expert, outside consultants, and one local teacher/instructional practitioner. In order to foster effective schooling, goals and objectives include activities intended to promote change in school environmental and social conditions. (BJD)

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Academy for the Advancement of Teaching and Management

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"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
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"Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them"

A Nation at Risk, p.5.

"This is an exciting time for education in America. I want New Jersey to be among the first states to answer the nationwide call for reform"

Governor Thomas H. Kean,
speech before a joint session
of the New Jersey Legislature,
September 6, 1983.

"The purpose of the academy is to improve the sense of professionalism in the schools ... [it] will demonstrate how to improve teaching skills, ... and focus on practical applications of the latest research findings."

Governor Thomas H. Kean, ibid.

I. INTRODUCTION

American education is under a cloud of uncertainty. The public questions whether its tax dollars are being well spent. Parents worry that their children are not learning the skills they will need in order to succeed in a changing world. Employers complain that graduates are not adequately prepared to enter the work force. Teachers and school administrators warn that they are being expected to fill the roles that once belonged to the family and religion. National leaders caution that we are losing our technological competitive edge.

National Reports

In the past 18 months, a number of national commissions have reported their findings about our nation's schools. From the Governor's Commission on Science and Technology in New Jersey, to national groups such as the President's National Commission on Excellence in Education, Ernest Boyer's High School published by the Carnegie Institute, and the Report of the Economic Commission of the States, we have received a number of recommendations concerning our schools. While these recommendations and conclusions have not been uniform, there is a common thread woven through them.

Common Thread

This thread is that we can, and must, do a better job of educating our young. The various studies discuss: an enriched curriculum; increased learning time for students; more homework; higher standards and expectations, and improving the quality of staff.

While many of the recommendations deal with policy, funding, certification, and salaries, there is a core of concerns that focus on the school, the classroom and the act of teaching itself. The policy, funding, and certification issues may be considered to be supporting issues. Overall, the improvement of the act of teaching -- of delivering a curriculum that will prepare our youth for the future -- is the key to improving our schools. Quality instructional and classroom management is our basic responsibility.

Classroom Instruction

The improvement of classroom instruction and management starts with the classroom teacher. As Madeline Hunter, noted educational researcher states, the science of teaching depends on what a teacher does in planning, and then implementing those plans in the classroom (1976). Teaching is a learned act involving specific behaviors.

Academy

New Jersey is committed to improve the quality of instruction and management of its schools through the creation of an Academy for the Advancement of Teaching and Management.

The academy will train experienced, successful teachers, rather than novice staff or those who need to improve their skills to succeed. This decision is based upon the academy's intent to provide opportunities for teachers to expand and stretch their skills to new limits, and not to remediate them.

Within the academy's function is its goal of raising the standards of professional skills for all New Jersey teachers and principals.

Participation in academy programs will create a cadre of highly proficient, accomplished teachers who will lead their peers by example.

II. ACADEMY MISSION

The academy will have as its mission the training of teachers and administrators in highly specific, structured teaching and instructional management practices. The result will be the expanded use of pedagogical skills and practices by educators, and the growth of educators' sense of professionalism and pride in their craft. Specifically, educational practitioners will be able to successfully use a greater array of instructional strategies with pupils; administrators will be able to offer more instructional assistance to staff. Ultimately, student learning will be enhanced.

This academy will carry out its mission by demonstrating, through structure and operation, the tenets of teaching principles, supervision and organizational change.

III. ACADEMY STRUCTURE

Voluntary

Participation in the academy will be voluntary. Schools will elect to participate, as will individual staff members.

As professionals, teachers genuinely seek high quality assistance. However, for individuals to truly change their behaviors, they must see the need for change, and then want to change. Change imposed from outside has a lesser chance of success than change that is voluntarily sought from within.

School Teams

Schools electing to participate will send to the academy a team of three to five teachers, and the building principal. In larger districts, a central office curriculum/instructional specialist may be included.

The team concept is important. Past experience has demonstrated that probability of success in changing an organization increases when a number of people within the organization work together with the active participation of the school principal. The fewer staff involved, the greater the probability of teacher isolation and disillusionment and eventual disappearance of the new methods. Where the building principal is actively supporting and involved with a team of teachers, the instances of success become much greater.

Critical Mass

Teachers volunteering for specific training will be from the same building. While it may strain the school's continuing educational program to lose three to five teachers and the principal, simultaneously, for a week, it does create a "critical mass" within the building. Small schools with fewer staff may need a smaller critical mass. Teachers, upon returning, will be able to "buddy up" and assist each other. The principal, having participated, will be much more apt to be helpful and supportive, and the team approach to training will help build a collegial sense of professional development.

Programs

Programs offered will have a strong theoretical base. When a learner understands the reasoning behind an activity, learning becomes easier. Programs the academy offers will be highly credible, with a proven record, in addition to being theoretically sound. Programs will not only be able to explain "what to do" but also "why."

The programs will focus on specific, practical instructional and classroom management methods that can be used to teach many subject areas. Examples of such programs are: Madeline Hunters' instructional process of reinforcement, motivation, retention and transfer; inductive thinking strategies, or Bruner's concept-development approach.

The academy will use the following instructional strategy:

- o presenting information on background and theory;
- o modeling or demonstrating the desired behaviors;
- o practicing under simulated conditions;

- o critiquing and providing structural feedback; and
- o coaching for application in the classroom (adapted from Bruce Joyce, 1983).

Multiple Year

Training in new approaches and the ensuing internalization takes time and practice. Our experience in New Jersey has shown that it can take up to three to five years before a new practice is completely integrated into a school. The academy training sequence is envisioned as at least a two-year cycle. The cycle would start in the first year with an intensive multiple day training session. The length of time involved would depend on the program. The focus will be on instruction, demonstration, and conceptual understanding. Participants will return to their schools to practice and use the new skills. On-site observation and assistance by academy staff will be followed by refresher session(s) possibly three months, six months and one year after the initial training. The second year will be dedicated to continued classroom use, refinement and integration of the skills. Demonstrations and training of additional teaching staff in the school will be a major function of the school team during the second year of the cycle. Technical and professional suppport from the academy may be needed in this phase.

After the second year, as the new skills are perfected and integrated, the building principal and staff will continue to help each other, and begin the cycle of explanation, demonstration, practice, feedback and application with additional staff. The process will be completely integrated when the entire staff uses the instructional methods without thinking of them as new, but as the way they teach.

Team Building

The academy will be structured as an experience where teams of individuals succeed together.

In order for teachers to succeed in using their new abilities in their classrooms, they will have to rely on each other and their principal. For adults to grasp new methods of teaching, their training will have to include simulations, demonstrations and intensive coaching and feedback. These are all activities that can be "high risk" for adults. But they are activities that are demanded when adults are retrained. For this reason, during both the training and implementation stages, great emphasis will be placed on colleagues working together. Feedback, correction, and assistance roles will be made appropriate for all participants. Co-planning, sharing teacher-observer roles, pairing, etc., will become part of the climate of professionalism at the academy. A participant should feel that the experience was rewarding, both in the technical sense and the human sense.

Multiple Effect

The result of the trained team subsequently demonstrating and training others, might be termed the "multiple effect." Such a strategy, historically, has had mixed results. The passage of time and the arrival of new crises often get in the way of the training responsibility to which participants have previously committed themselves. However, when one considers that without some multiple effect, the challenge would be to train, individually, every administrator and teacher in the state, a serious attempt to use such a strategy must be made.

Since we recognize the wide array of instructional strategies/processes available, and the vast range of needs unmet, it is impossible to predetermine and prescribe a program for all participants. Rather, the academy will focus on identifying and providing, at least initially, a limited number of highly attractive and credible alternatives.

IV. PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Funding

We envision a jointly funded program. In addition to a state appropriation of $250,000, foundations and private industry will be approached to raise an additional $100,000 to $250,000 per year. Also, a participant tuition fee will be charged to participating schools in addition to their released time costs. This total program cost will require significant commitment of local boards of education.

Development

While the academy program will be a project of the department, the involvement of regional labs, state professional associations, private/nonpublic schools, higher education and national experts on inservice and teacher training will be sought.

Representation

Representation from various organizations and associations in the planning of the academy is critical. At a time when there is disagreement elsewhere, the educational community can come together here, and demonstrate their common support and commitment to quality education.

Contracts

In order to ensure that the local school district is committed to a multi-year improvement process with the academy, a contract describing joint responsibilities and joint commitments will be developed. As previously mentioned, time and new crises sometimes get in the way of the responsibility to train others in the

district. A contract detailing such responsibilities, signed by the board of education, will improve the probability that the administration will encourage and support the training.

V. STAFFING

In addition to a director/trainer, the program will include: several permanent staff trainers; a one-year resident "visiting expert" (a person with a nationally known academic reputation); a provision for hiring outside consultants for specific training tasks, and one teacher on a one-year leave from a local district. This teacher will be known as an "instructional practitioner."

Instructional Practitioner

One instructional practitioner will work with the academy the first year of its operation. This individual will be a skilled, experienced teacher with a history of successful, creative classroom experiences, who is on leave from the local district. This teacher will be open to new ideas; a quick learner, and a capable communicator comfortable in both large and small group settings.

The instructional practitioner will fill many roles within the academy. He/she will be involved in the initial stages of planning and establishing the academy. The instructional practitioner will help train academy participants. When training is completed, this person will be a resource/information link for participants who have returned to their schools. As part of the instructional practitioner's role during training, he/she will also be a demonstration teacher. Arrangements will be made to have a local school serve as a demonstration site, and the instructional practitioner will have regular access to a classroom throughout the year. Using the curriculum and materials of that school, the instructional practitioner will put into practice those skills taught at the academy. Video taping and/or observation rooms will allow academy participants to see those skills put into practice.

The school district, which releases the teacher, and the teacher him/herself will gain from the one year experience. The school will receive, after a year, an individual with heightened curriculum planning skills and a wide range of practical and technical skills in instructional improvement.

Visiting Expert

A second staffing strategy to be developed by the academy is that of the "visiting expert." Annually, a nationally recognized educational scholar will be employed by the academy. The visting expert will be the key instructor at the academy. He/she will focus upon educational improvement within his or her area of expertise.

The position will be similar to that of a visting university professor. In addition to working with academy participants, the visiting expert will publish monographs and communicate with public and professional groups statewide.

VI. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The development objectives of the academy are:

1. The establishment of an operational academy by January, 1985.
2. The first year -- to conduct training programs in at least one instructional program.
3. The second year -- to conduct training with an expanded number of programs and to help the teams from year one of the cycle to implement their new skills in their own classrooms.

VII. MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Effective Schools

The academy is one strategy for improving the quality of New Jersey schools. In the past several years, a number of studies and reports have described what makes a school effective. This body of literature, called the "effective schools research", is increasingly straightforward in describing two sets of factors that exist in schools where students are achieving. While there are many models, the following example is adapted from the work of Bruce Joyce (1982).

One set of improvement variables deals with the "what is to be done" element. These are the practical, pragmatic factors that can be learned and executed. They include:

- setting high expectations for students;
- teacher efficacy;
- practicing positive public relations;
- ensuring that a high degree of school time is spent on appropriate student learning;
- ensuring that such things as student progress reports and homework are done frequently and monitored;
- organizing the curriculum so that is is clear and balanced, and ensuring that teachers are using a variety of teaching methods.

These are exactly the variables that the academy will deal with, directly or indirectly.

A second set of effective school variables is less a set of activities than a description of environmental or social conditions. It is difficult to effect change in a school unless these environmental or social conditions exist in the school. There must be:

- o clear academic and social goals that are supported by the majority of the faculty. The staff must be caring and dedicated to their students;
- o strong supportive administrative leadership;
- o community and parental support for the school and its activities;
- o a staff attitude that permits and encourages student responsibility;
- o an orderly environment in the school, and minimal disruptions.

The majority of these factors emanate from people who first care, believe and then act. These factors cannot be created solely through training.

It can be argued that volunteering for academy training will be a strong indication that the caring and believing are already present. But that can only be considered hypothetical. For lasting improvement to take root, the skills and behaviors learned during academy training will have to be practiced in a school setting where the entire faculty addresses the social or environmental conditions.

VIII. SUMMARY

Proposed is a two-phase academy supported by tuition, and private and state dollars, that is voluntarily attended by school teams on a two-year cycle. The first year of the training is composed of intensive multiple-day training followed by refresher sessions possibly three months, six months and one year later. The second year is dedicated to classroom use, refinement, and integration of the skills into the regular program.

Various training programs will be offered based upon different instructional strategies and approaches. The emphasis in the initial training stages will be on understanding an instructional approach, with the teachers responsible for using their new skills in the classroom, aided and encouraged by their peers. Department staff, while responsible for the organization and operation of the academy, will use a wide range of input to plan, and a variety of experts and local practitioners to operate the project.

Properly conducted, the academy has the potential to become a major force to improve the quality of classroom instruction in New Jersey. Not only will the academy directly contribute to school improvement by expanding the skills and expertise of our teachers, but the academy will help set new standards of professional excellence.

A higher quality of education can only be achieved for our children when we invest in helping teachers help themselves to become experts in their field.

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